



ORV Watch Kern County  
<http://www.orvwatchkerncounty.com>  
Tehachapi, CA  
661-878-7838

April 2, 2014

Mr. Sixto J. Fernandez  
OHMVR Division  
Sacramento, CA  
Grants and Cooperative Agreements Program

Hello Mr. Fernandez,

ORV WATCH staff and volunteers have proudly supported the Kern County Sheriff's Office's request for OHMVR Law Enforcement grant funds for many years. We hold our Kern County Sheriff's personnel in the highest regard. After critiquing the preliminary grant request, our team has several comments and observations.

During the last 16 months, the Pacific Crest Trail and BLM parcels have suffered more damage from illegal OHV use than we have witnessed in the past 6 years. Rural residents have been burdened with increased trespass onto private property. Illegal camping at the base of the Tehachapi Mountains in Rosamond and on the Aqueduct has increased, and these have become popular staging areas where dirt bikers meet to ride illegally and unimpeded onto the PCT, and private lands.

The KCSO grant proposal incorrectly includes the "Rosamond desert" as an "approved" OHV riding area. There are *no* "approved" designated OHV riding sites in the so-called "Rosamond desert" except on property personally owned by riders. It is a fact that many out-of-town riders who own a few acres in Rosamond, stage riding expeditions into the Tehachapi Mountains from their desert property. The riders typically excuse trespass activities by insisting, "We own property here." An example of this type of trespass activity occurred on March 22, 2014. Details are listed in SR14-07714.

The KCSO grant proposal states:

"KCSO requests grant funds to expand and enhance current safety and enforcement efforts to achieve a balance between available OHV opportunities and the protection of life, property, and natural resources."

We understand that the KCSO is challenged to strike a perfect balance between actual law enforcement duties and education. One complements the other. However, datum received from the Kern County Sheriff's office indicates that law enforcement activity weighs quite heavily on the side of education, and negligibly for actual law enforcement intervention.

From 2012-2013, KCSO issued 161 warnings, made 2 arrests and issued 10 citations. Despite request for information, we were not provided with details regarding how many of these citations resulted in convictions. Conversely, officers conducted *thousands* of camp checks and educational contacts.

Ridgecrest BLM, in partnership with the Kern County Sheriff's Office ORVET Team, has lost control over illegal OHV activity on the Pacific Crest Trail, Wilderness areas, and BLM sites within WEMO lands in their jurisdiction. It is evident that efforts to contain lawless OHV riding have not met with documented success. Law enforcement strategies must be assessed and restructured so that year after year efforts are not met with statistical failure and ongoing OHV degradation to public lands.

The KCSO grant proposal states:

"On popular OHV weekends KCSO will use grant funds to continue to stage a Command Post in the Dove Springs Open Riding Area. The Command Post operates similarly to a Sheriff's Substation and is a unified effort among KCSO, Desert Search and Rescue, Kern County Fire Department, Kern County Park Rangers and BLM personnel. This unified Command Post enhances law enforcement coordination and reduces duplication of efforts. The Command Post will continue to serve as a central location to offer safety and educational materials, provide first aid, and coordinate all search and rescue missions for lost and/or injured riders. The Command Post continues to be a huge success and well received by OHV enthusiasts who appreciate a centralized location for information and/or help in emergency situations."

"The Sheriff's Office is responsible to provide law enforcement services to the unincorporated areas of the County."

On long holiday weekends, OHV enthusiasts are treated to bottled water, Band-Aids, and brochures, while at the same time, rural residents are plagued with an inpour of lawless riders into their small quiet communities. Residents are not receiving help during long weekends when their lives are made miserable by illegal dirt bike activity.

We have current abundant photographic evidence that depicts large groups of professional dirt bike riders and dirt bike racing groups joyriding on the PCT and causing stunning damage to the trail. Illegal hill climbs are eroding sensitive Tehachapi Mountain sites. These riders are staging in the Rosamond desert below the mountains.

Years ago ORVET would often park their off-road RV in the Rosamond and Backus Road area to conduct OHV checkpoints, after which illegal riding lessened considerably for months. In 2010 law enforcement departments conducted a sting in the Tehachapi Mountains. Subsequently, lawless riding was deterred for nearly a year. The greater Tehachapi community has been reaching out to law enforcement for help, and the response has been disappointing.

Over the years, as personnel transferred to different positions within the department, the KCSO lost touch with rural residents and the stakeholder process gradually deteriorated. Rural residents are frustrated that law enforcement is failing to protect private property and public lands from OHV trespass.

Lawless riders are emboldened to trespass on private property and to abuse public lands because there have been no consequences for their actions. This adds to the escalating conflict brewing in rural communities.

In conclusion, we are suggesting that KCSO should utilize volunteer resources such as Reserve Deputies and Explorers to hand out educational and safety pamphlets so that Law Enforcement Officers can free up valuable time to enforce the law. Secondly, the command post can be rotated to outlying towns where law enforcement presence is sorely needed. Finally, random flyovers by the KCSO helicopter can help deter joyriding on the PCT. USFS and BLM Rangers with boots on the ground would greatly benefit from air support.

We suggest that Law Enforcement Grant funds be used for actual law enforcement activities. It would be a win for everyone--the community and responsible OHV riders alike--if the KCSO would commit to reining in illegal riders as an integral part of their overall strategy.

Sincerely,  
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